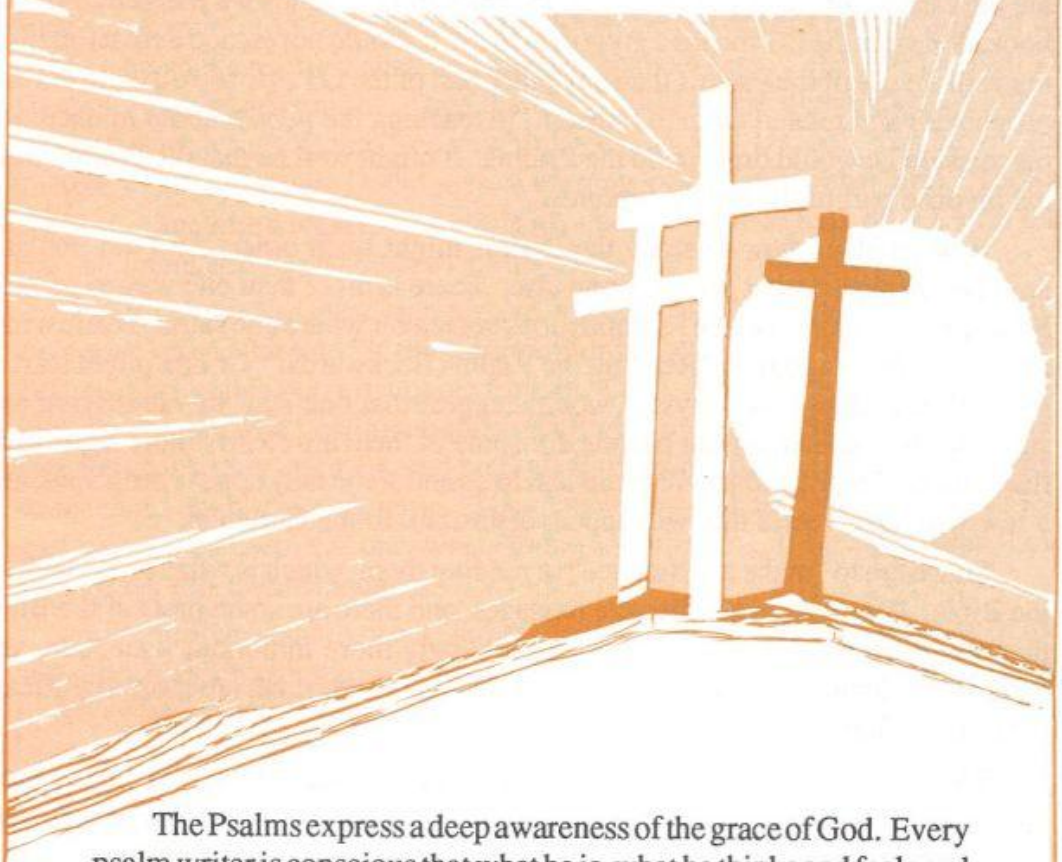
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Psalms express a deep awareness of the grace of God. Every psalm writer is conscious that what he is, what he thinks and feels and believes, depends entirely on the God who has acted first in his life.
--George A. F. Knight

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . . No.2

WE LINGER IN THE PSALMS

In our first installment on what the Old Testament means to us we began with the Psalms, and in this second installment we linger still in the Psalms. We do this not only because the Psalms are a substantial part of the OT but also because they are the essence of the OT. If we catch the spirit of the Psalms we will see from that book alone that the OT means a great deal to us. It should not escape us that our Lord made more use of the Psalms than any other part of the OT. He took its prayers and prophecies and related them to himself. In teaching the people about himself and his mission he would draw upon the Psalms. It might well be that the Psalms were his favorite part of the holy Scriptures.

A word about how to study the Psalms might be in order, but I am not sure anyone can answer that for everyone else. There is more than one way to go at it. Since there is no order to the Psalms it does not matter where one starts. I once wrote a piece for this journal on “Reading the Psalms Backwards.” Or one might start in the middle and go both ways! I would suggest that one start by identifying and studying the more important psalms, for some of them are clearly more significant than others. Some psalms will mean less to us and some may appear irrelevant; and a few will have verses that will appear distasteful to the Christian.

So we are to “make a difference” in reading them, which is what we do with all the Bible. We all have our favorite passages, and there are some parts of the Bible that seem meaningless to us. Romans is clearly more important than Jude, and Isaiah than Zephaniah, and some things in Romans and Isaiah are more significant than others things in those books.

This is true of the Psalms, so it is appropriate for one to look first to “the great psalms.” There is a selection made in Leslie Weatherhead’s *The Busy Man’s Old Testament* of approximately half of the psalms that I have used with appreciation. I read each psalm he selected in more than one version along with a commentary. Since you might like to do likewise I will pass along Weatherhead’s list: Ps. l, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22-24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 32-34, 36 (vs. 5-10), 37 (vs. 1-11), 40 (omit 14-15), 42, 43, 45-48, 51 (vs. 1-17), 55 (vs. 1-8, 11-14, 22), 56, 57, 63 (vs. 1-8), 65-67, 71-73, 84, 89 (vs. 1-9, 14-21, 34-37, 49-52), 90, 91 (with reservations), 95, 100, 102, 103, 107, 111, 113, 115, 118, 121-125, 126, 127, 130, 131, 137 (omit 8-9), 138, 139 (omit 19-21), 142, 143, 145-148, 150.

You will notice that he omits some verses in psalms that he selects. This is because he considers them offensive to Christian ethics, such as Ps. 137:9: “Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock,” and in Ps. 139:22 where David talks about hating with a perfect hatred. The worst is probably Ps. 109 which Weatherhead omits altogether. There David wants Satan to stand at his enemy’s side, his wife to be a widow, his children orphans, and he wants creditors to seize all his property. He even wants his enemy’s prayer to become sin. That is like Hamlet not wanting to avenge his father’s death by killing his murderer while he is in prayer at church, lest he go to heaven!

Weatherhead is right that this is a problem to a Christian reading the Psalms. C. S. Lewis, who is tolerant of these deprecatory psalms, may have the best answer, Conceding that they do not measure up to Christian standards, he first sees humor in them, as in Ps. 143 where David for eleven verses praises God in a strain that brings tears to the reader’s eyes, and then suddenly in verse 12 he asks God “in Thy goodness slay my enemies.” Then there is Ps. 139 where in the midst of moving prayer David says, “Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!” But Lewis finds the worst in Ps. 23 where David says, according to Moffatt’s translation, “Thou art my host, spreading a feast for me while my enemies have to look on.” Lewis finds this sentiment petty in an otherwise sublime psalm.

Lewis admits that these cursings are indeed devilish and that they were against their own law which said “If thine enemy hunger, give him bread, etc.” (The New Testament says this but it is a quote from the OT!), and so they are without excuse in their cursings. But Lewis recognizes they were reacting against severe injustices perpetrated by their enemies, and he finds it refreshing that the psalmists could be so incensed against wrongdoing. They knew how to hate! They identify God’s enemies as their own, and they want God to squash them. It isn’t Christian, Lewis admits, but it is understandable.

A study of the Psalms can be rather overwhelming. There are so many of them and there is much repetition. If we could make but a few of the psalms really ours by knowing them so well that we virtually have them memorized, that would be better than to have only a superficial understanding of all of them. To this end I have selected ten that I will list as “the greatest psalms” and invite you to make them your own. While you will occasionally read the other psalms, these you could read over and over, year after year, until they become part of you. While there are many other psalms I love, here are the ten I select if I limit myself to but ten. That is about the right number for someone who may have difficulty getting into the Psalms. These are, more or less, listed in order of their significance to me.

Psalm 19. I agree with C. S. Lewis that this is probably the greatest of the psalms, and he esteems it as the greatest verses of all literature. And the last lines give us a model prayer: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer The psalm is beautifully balanced with an exultation of God’ s creation (“The heavens declare the glory of God, etc.”), vs. 1-6; and of His law (“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, etc.”), vs. 7-11; and personal penance and prayer (“Cleanse me from secret faults, etc.”), vs. 12-14.

Psalm 23. Even if this psalm is marred by the petty line (vs. 5) about David’s enemies, it is one that we should memorize both for its literary beauty and its spiritual depth. If for no other reason it has to be included in this list because it is the most loved psalm for Jews and Christians alike in all the Psalter.

Psalm 139. This one comes near being my favorite, especially certain verses. It gives us a prayer that any believer would do well to memorize and include in his own prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

This psalm is movingly soul-searching (“You understand my thoughts afar off’) and exults in the magnanimity of God (“Where can I go from Your Spirit?”). The psalmist even sees God knitting him together in his mother’s womb and describes himself as “fearfully and wonderfully made.” It has some of the most enrapturing verses of all the Bible. If you memorize parts of it and say them to yourself when things go wrong, it will change your life. It is powerful!

Psalm 46. For Martin Luther’s sake I have to include the psalm that inspired his “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and it is surely one of the great portions of all Scripture. This is a most comforting psalm during this time of international crisis. I love its great *therefore*—“Therefore we will not fear. . .” It also says that it is God that makes wars cease, and it gives us one of the great lines of the Bible, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Psalm 110. For our Lord’s sake I must include this one, for when he read it he saw himself in it (Mt. 22:33). And Jesus says that David was “in the Spirit” when he wrote it. He identifies himself (Messiah) as the one David was referring to when he said, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” This psalm also identifies the coming Messiah with that mysterious figure Melchizedek introduced back in Gen. 14, “You arc a priest forever of the order of Melchizedek.” This

priestly king appears to come out of nowhere or from another world to bless Abraham and to receive tithes from him. So, the writer of Hebrews uses this psalm and the Genesis account to establish Christ's eternal priesthood (Heb. 5:6). This makes this psalm one of the most significant to New Testament writers, who often quote from it.

Psalm 51. I include this psalm because it shows that the OT recognizes that religion is basically a matter of the heart and that salvation is always by grace and not by our own goodness or our own works. David wrote it amidst his agonizing repentance following his sin of both adultery and murder. He comes to terms with his sin as we all must ("My sin is ever before me") and he realizes that forgiveness is only by God's grace ("Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"). He comes to see that it is not ritual sacrifices that God wants but "a broken and contrite heart." This is not simply a beautiful psalm, but one that we need in that it shows what religion is all about.

Psalm 90. I include this one for Moses' sake. By tradition it is "A Prayer of Moses," the only one by him in the Psalter. It is also a "Wisdom" psalm, one of several, in that it lays out common sense advice about life and time and stuff. Time? "We finish our years like a sigh" (vs. 9); "A thousand years in God's sight are like yesterday when it is past" (vs. 4, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:8). Life? "The days of our lives are seventy years, and if by reason of strength they arc eighty years" (vs. 10); "So teach us to number our days that we might gain a heart of wisdom" (vs 12). Stuff? "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (vs. 14). This psalm also gives us a wonderful doxology which begins with "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations" (vs. 1). We should memorize large portions of this psalm.

Psalm 15. I choose this psalm because it is one of the few places in the Bible that tells us who is going to heaven and who isn't. It asks "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?" The answer is clearly given with no if's nor and's nor but's. So, if you want to know how to go to heaven read this psalm. Since ten conditions are given, this psalm is sometimes referred to as "another Ten Commandments." One of the commandments especially impresses me: "He honors those who fear the Lord." What a contrast to worldly honor!

Psalm 119. Some will disagree with me for including this among the ten greatest psalms. It is not named by either Weatherhead or Lewis. But I see it as one of the most remarkable portions of all the Bible. It is not only a literary masterpiece but it is chock-full of goodies. It is not only the longest psalm but the longest (by far) of any chapter in the Bible. It is divided into 21 sections of eight verses each (probably for memorizing purposes), each prefaced by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 176 verses and every verse refers to the word of God. The many synonyms for the word of God are

impressive: law, statutes, precepts, commandments, judgments, testimonies, ordinances. But we are not to suppose that the psalmist was talking about what we call the Bible, including what he was then writing, such as, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my pathway.” He was referring to oral tradition and to the revelation that he received in his own communion with God, some of which eventually became Scripture.

Among some of the spiritual goodies in this remarkable psalm are:

Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You. (vs. 11)

Open my eyes, that I may see

Wondrous things from Your law. (vs. 18)

Before I was afflicted I went astray,

But now I keep Your word. (vs.67)

Forever, O Lord,

Your word is settled in heaven. (vs.89)

As you linger in the Psalms you will expand your list of great ones, such as Ps. 1, 8, 24, 32, etc., but this will serve as a good start. Another way of mining the Psalms is to identify some of the more relevant verses, those that reach out and really touch your heart and mind, wherever they appear in the Psalter. A good way to do this is to underscore them in red (Try to find at least one for each psalm), and then return often and read them again and again. Here is an example of what I mean, taken from psalms beside the ten already listed.

For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God

Than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. (84:10)

Mercy and truth have met together;

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. (85:10)

Precious in the sight of the Lord

Is the death of His saints. (116:15)

I was glad when they said to me,

Let us go into the house of the Lord. (122:1)

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,

The fruit of the womb is his reward. (127:3)

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brethren to dwell together in unity. (133:1)

If you linger long with the psalms searching for such gold nuggets, you will in time have hundreds of such verses as these underscored. You will soon find yourself saying with the psalmist, "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (119:97).

Those passages underlined in red and deposited in your heart and mind will be evidence enough of what the Old Testament means to us. They might even lessen the sin in your life as Ps. 119:11 indicates, "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you."—*the Editor*

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WHAT CAMPBELL SAID TO THE BAPTISTS

Some years ago I took part in a seminar at Baylor University on the relationship between Churches of Christ and Baptists, especially from a historical perspective. It was, I think, the first time ever on that campus that a friendly, scholarly exchange took place between representatives of these churches. Most contact between these peoples, especially in Texas, has been confrontational, such as public debates, which have been legion. But this time it was brotherly and positive.

An interesting anecdote grew out of that occasion. One Baptist student who was engaged to a Church of Christ girl saw notices of the seminar on campus bulletin boards and could not believe his eyes. A brotherly gathering between leaders of the Church of Christ and Baptists! He came to see for himself, and he was overjoyed to meet someone from the Church of Christ that would treat him as an equal in Christ. He had had such bitter experiences in trying to deal with his fiancé's church folk that it was a threat to their relationship.

He was willing to be married in a Church of Christ, as his fiancé and her people insisted, and even by a Church of Christ minister. But he drew the line at one point: he refused to be married by a minister who did not even consider him a Christian! Needless to say that I was to him a God-send. It turned out that I performed their marriage in a small

town Church of Christ in Texas hill country. But I never succeeded in persuading her people to accept him as a fellow Christian, not even when I pointed out that he was a baptized believer just as they were. Their unyielding spirit eventually alienated the girl and she eventually joined the Baptists. With a little loving acceptance they could have gained a son; instead they lost a daughter.

At that seminar I told my favorite story about Alexander Campbell and the Baptists. It was 1866 and Campbell was on his death bed. A unity meeting was being held at the same time in Pittsburgh. Charles Loos, who served on the faculty with Campbell at Bethany College, presided over the unity gathering. When he afterwards wrote a history of the Movement, Loos told of his visit with Campbell during his last days and how he reacted to the Baptist-Disciple unity effort. “I have always regretted that the Baptists and we had to part; it ought not to have been so. Moved to tears by the good news that Loos had brought, the dying reformer went on to say, “I had hoped that we and that great people could have stood together for the advocacy of apostolic Christianity. They are worthy of such a mission.”

While the Disciples and the Baptists were not able to effect a union, the prospect of it was enough to warm the heart of Alexander Campbell. And it confirms what Campbell often contended, that the unity of believers was the heart and soul of his efforts at reform.

The Baylor folk thought it odd that while the leading figure in Church of Christ history would weep with joy at the prospect of unity with Baptists (and insisted they should have never separated!), there is such little of that spirit today. I noted that that is why we need to study our own history, for the lessons of history obligate us to be more sensitive.

I thought of that story when I came upon some things that Campbell had said to the Baptists, tucked away in a letter he wrote to a Baptist preacher named James Inglis in the 1850 *Millennial Harbinger.* I esteem it as one of the most moving pleas for unity that I have ever read from anyone’s pen:

> If all you good Baptist brethren, and our good Christian brethren, could abandon every other center than Christ, and draw nearer and nearer to this unsetting sun of an eternal day, how soon would all these roots of bitterness and alienation wither, and languish, and perish! What a blissful cooperation and hallowed concert of action would ensue! What a revenue of glory to a common Savior and a common Father would arise!

> And how soon would we throw the arms of Christian affection and Christian enterprise around our own happy land, and make the wilderness and solitary places glad, and cause the deserts to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

What a glorious description of unity that is! As we draw closer to Christ we grow closer to each other. We can find each other only at the center and that is where Christ must be. Campbell was right in saying that we all have centers beside Christ, and not the least of these are our denominational peculiarities in which we take pride, whether conventions, agencies, colleges, publication houses. We don't want our little systems disturbed. Sometimes our center is a system of theology or a set of traditions. We have our Baptistisms and our Church of Christisms. And we don't want to move them from center stage.

Abandon every center but Christ! There is no other way to unity. Campbell does not say that opinions or peripheral matters must be abandoned, but only those things that are moved to center stage and made tests of fellowship.

Campbell may well have had Co!. 2:19 in mind when he made that plea: "holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God."

If there is a pattern for unity that is it. Jesus Christ is our pattern. That passage refers to our being "knit together," and there is no better description of unity than that. And how are we knit together? Not by an exact doctrinal conformity or by practicing everything alike, but by "holding fast to the Head." We should let that phrase ring in our ears and lodge in our hearts, *holding fast to the Head.* Unity and fellowship are not based on being "right on the issues," but on being right about Christ.

Campbell recognized that we can hold fast to the Head and yet have diverse views and practices. We might be wrong about some things and still make Christ the center.

Campbell closed his letter to his Baptist friend by expressing what could be called the genius of his plea:

> Our motto is: "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible." Let him that has a dream keep it to himself, and let him that has the word of God in his heart speak it, and make proper allowance for difference of opinion, and the work is done.

Here is the way to unity for all believers: Make Christ the center, hold fast to him as the Head, and allow for diversity of opinion. That's it, Campbell is saying. The work is done. Is it so wonderfully simple that we are afraid of it?—*the Editor*

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WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (2)

I made it clear in the first installment of this series that I am not questioning the personal faith of its members when I speak of what the Churches of Christ must do to be saved. I may even be prejudiced in favor of our people, for I believe they are among the most wonderful Christians in the world, and that is based upon contact with thousands of people in Churches of Christ. When I speak of what we must do to be saved I am referring to our witness as a church in a troubled world that needs us so badly, to our effectiveness as a people of God. If we are "saved" in this sense there are some major changes that we need to make. That is what this series is about.

I may have a quarrel with my own folk in Churches of Christ, but no one can justly accuse me of being vindictive or disloyal. If it is a quarrel, it is a lover's quarrel. I compliment myself only in one respect—I am among the best friends that the Churches of Christ have. I recall reading somewhere that a person who is pleading for change among his own people is paying them a great compliment, for it means that he believes in them and is persuaded that they are capable of greater things.

And I won't leave, never. I feel the same way toward the Church of Christ as I do toward my wife Ouida. To leave her is unthinkable. I assure her that I will stay with her no matter what comes. If she ends up in a wheel chair, I will be at her side. When I was at Princeton Seminary it was suggested that I might become a Presbyterian. No way. The Church of Christ is stuck with me. If they should kick me out, which hasn't happened yet —except that a group of black preachers once withdrew from me along with one of their own "liberal" ministers that I defended, but afterward they rescinded their action—I would be back the next day trying to get in.

Like old Raccoon John Smith, one of our pioneer preachers, used to say to the Baptists when they tried to run him off, I say to the Church of Christ, "I love you too much to leave you!" But as long as I am around I will persistently and lovingly plead with our people to go up higher.

The basis of my quarrel is our parochial, sectarian view of the church. I want our people to think big—ecumenically—when they think of "the church," for this is the biblical view. I want them to envision the Church of Christ as consisting of all those everywhere, all around the world, who sincerely follow Jesus Christ.

We can never be saved for a meaningful and viable ministry to the world and to the church at large so long as we think of "the Church of Christ" in terms of those listed under that name in the Yellow Pages. It is typical for our folk to think of "the church" in a city like Denton, Texas to be only those that have "Church of Christ" on the sign out front. No body else. And we limit "the Lord's people" to our own "Church of Christ" folk. The tragedy of this is compounded by the fact that many of our people really believe this. We are the only Christians!

I was reminded of this fallacy on our part when I recently visited the Word of Faith in Farmers Branch (between Denton and Dallas), which bills itself as "Charismatic-Fundamental," where Robert Tilton holds forth. I was there to hear and to see again my friend and brother Pat Boone, who was special guest that Sunday. I had already broken bread that Lord's day with the Singing Oaks Church of Christ in Denton at our 8 a.m. assembly. Two hours later I joined about 4,000 others at Word of Faith, where they really give visitors "the treatment." They make one really feel welcome! At one point in the service I had a crowd of folk around me assuring me that my visit was appreciated. Scores of other visitors were being treated the same way. I was pinned, labeled, given literature and even a free gift (a cassette tape of a previous service).

And they really rev it up—a band (far too loud from where I sat), cheer leaders with pompons, special lighting, multiple song leaders, clapping and stylistic body movements, lots of praising ("Praise Him, church, praise Him! "), video screens that come down out of heaven, uniformed ushers galore—all first class, including the elegant edifice. It is a "health-wealth gospel" church and Rev. Tilton is the star performer. And he does perform, down into the aisles. He does indeed talk about Jesus, but there is no way to miss Tilton. His picture is on billboards and in newspapers from Dallas to Denton. He has a video presentation along with his sermon (on three screens that come down out of heaven) that features him in mission stations around the world.

If you join his church you will get rich (or something akin to that) and you are not to forget Rev. Tilton and Word of Faith when the money starts coming in. One does get the impression that those attending were all doing well, including more than a handful of blacks, but we may presume that those that tried it and did not get rich were no longer around.

The service went for two hours. We stood a lot of that time, reving it up and praising God. It got so loud, especially with the band, that at times I had to cover my ears. It was no place for an innocent non-instrument Church of Christ guy like me, but I was a good sport. But I thought they would never get to Pat Boone, who sat on the large stage all that time. And it is a stage, or a performance center with' the latest state-of-the-art electronics. Robert Tilton goes first class, you better believe it! And he is not to be upstaged, not even by Pat Boone.

Tilton saved Pat about 20 or 25 minutes at the end, and he was super as he always is. Pat is not only a sweet singer of gospel hymns, but he is humble and projects the One he sings about rather than himself. That was not true of all who performed that morning!

When he gave his testimony between songs he talked about his life in the Church of Christ, including the preaching he did "at a little frame building in Slidell, Texas" when he was attending the University of North Texas in Denton. He told of his days at "a Church of Christ college in Nashville" (David Lipscomb) where he met his wife Shirley, who was the daughter of Red Foley of country music fame. But Shirley was a Southern Baptist, and even though she had been baptized into Christ just as he had, Pat convinced her that she was not a Christian and that she must be baptized again the right way and in the right church.

He explained that the way he saw it back then was that if a church didn't have the right name over the door it just didn't count. His people were the only true Christians, the only right church. Even though Pat expressed appreciation for Church of Christ people and for his heritage ("I learned to love the Book"), he had laid bare our Achilles heel. Most of his audience, being Texans, knew at least one thing about the Church of Christ—that we think we are the only true church and the only ones going to heaven.

Pat did not know, of course, that I or any others from the Church of Christ were in the audience. When I saw him after the service he hugged my neck and apologized with "I hope I didn't sound bitter." He was not bitter, and we both knew that what he had said was true and that there were things he could have said that he didn't, such as he and Shirley being disfellowshiped by the Church of Christ because of their divergent views on the Holy Spirit. His parents in Nashville were treated the same way by the Church of Christ where they were members, as well as his sister in Dyersburg, Tn. I am personally acquainted with all these tragic episodes.

The story Pat told to that big church can be repeated a thousand times over by people who have been virtually destroyed by our exclusivism and sectarianism. People who have never been able to win their spouses because of it; couples who have gone elsewhere after giving up hope that things would change; preachers who have either quit or gone to other

churches because they could not adjust to it; elders who have quietly exited because they could not conform to it; young people who have given up religion altogether in disgust.

Beside this we have tens of thousands in our congregations that are discouraged and don't know what to do. They are unhappy with the way things are and yet they don't want to leave. We are a people who theoretically abhor partyism, and yet we have allowed ourselves to become one of the most sectarian churches in America today.

I was present at a mainline Church of Christ recently when a visiting minister did something most unusual. Like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky he asked the assembly, "Has it ever bothered you to have to believe that your Methodist and Baptist neighbors are not even Christians?" He waited for a response. A few brave hands were raised, then a few more, and finally hands were up allover the house. Their hesitation was probably due to shock, for our people just aren't encouraged to do that kind of self-examination. But that is the kind of thing we must start doing if we are to be saved.

We are at heart a magnanimous people, loving and gracious. Our people do not want to be narrow, bigoted sectarians. We have been sold a bill of goods by well-meaning but misguided leaders of the past who have bamboozled us into believing that if we have any fellowship with a Methodist or a Presbyterian then we endorse or approve of all the errors in those religions. If we call on a Baptist minister to address us or lead a prayer in our assembly, then we compromise the truth and approve of all Baptist doctrine!

We don't ask ourselves, "Then how can we sing 'Lead Kindly Light' in church since it was written by John Henry Newman, a Roman Catholic bishop? In singing that hymn do we have to approve of all that we associate with Roman Catholicism?" If we can't have fellowship with folk with whom we differ, then we can't be in fellowship with anyone, not even our own spouses, for we all differ on some things.

To overcome the kind of advertisement Pat Boone gave us in Dallas—he nailed us to a cross of our own making—we are going to have to be up-front, come clean, and proclaim to the world that we have been wrong and we are sorry, and that we don't believe that way anymore. We are going to have to say it from our pulpits, *We have been wrong!* and publish it in our journals far and wide. The schools of preaching and the Christian colleges must explain to our youth how we went wrong and that we are making (or have made) a mid-course correction.

It is not enough to do or to say nothing, or simply to preach more on grace and about Christ. We must repent. We have a serious sin to confess. We have been factious and sectarian, dividing among ourselves again and again. We have hurt a lot of people and

confused even more, and we have churches full of people who are discouraged. We must become intolerant and disgusted with our own petty, narrow sectarianism.

We have been wrong! We are not going to be sectarians anymore! We are ceasing our insensitive practice of having nothing to do with other Christians and other churches! Henceforth we are going to treat all Christians as equals. and we will love and receive them even as Christ loves and receives us!

Let us say these things. You'll see hands going up allover the assembly, all, across the country and around the world. It will be a time of liberation for our people. It is not too late for us to be saved.—*the Editor*

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HOW ABOUT THE WAR?

It is my impression that we Americans are more uptight about the war in the Persian Gulf than we were with any other international crisis in our lifetime. In major cities across the nation there is an emergency hotline that people can call who find themselves overly distraught. My sister in Dallas is probably typical. When she went to her doctor for a checkup, he asked her what she was so nervous about. Unaware of being all that nervous, she replied, "If I'm nervous, it's that war." He advised her to turn off her TV.

That may be why this war provokes such uneasiness. More than ever before, the horror and reality of war is brought into our homes by TV, and this time around it is instant. My sister told me how she rode a bomb into Bagdad and went right down the elevator shaft of an Iraqi military facility! A TV camera was in the nose of the missile!

But there is another reason for our panicky feelings. All this came on us just as the Cold War had ended and at a time when it looked as if there might be real peace on earth and goodwill toward men. The Soviet Union was now our ally, Gorbachev won the Nobel Peace Prize, and the Berlin Wall came tumbling down! And, who could believe it?, Germany was reunited. Even more incredible, an enslaved Eastern Europe became free.

It was euphoria. We were caught up to Cloud 9. The world is going to make it after all, we were thinking. Then, bang! Saddam Hussein! There's a proverb that describes us, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

It will help to talk with each other about the war and share our feelings. I have asked numerous people what they think and how they feel, and I find everyone alarmed and fearful. We need to work out an acceptable way of looking at all this, and sharing ideas

should help. Confusion only accentuates our fears. We need to find a simple way of looking at a complex situation, somewhat the way Jesus responded to a perplexing question, *Shall we render tribute to Caesar or not?* He did not deliver an extended theological address, but said simply, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

I will join in the conversation about the war by telling a story that was passed along through the centuries by Jewish rabbis to illustrate their concept of community. Three men were in a boat together. One of the men began to bore a hole in the bottom of the boat beneath his seat. When the others protested, he explained that he was only boring a hole beneath *his* seat. And so the rabbis made their point about community. “We are all in the boat together,” they said.

That is our rationale for being in the Gulf war. It can remain debatable as to whether we should have waited longer for sanctions to work. What is clear is that we had to do something, and the reason is simple. We are all in the same boat with Saddam Hussein, and what he does beneath his own seat concerns us all. If he is bent on destroying his world then he is bent on destroying our world. We had to do something, and when you are dealing with a man who understands only one language, which is force, then that means war, sooner or later.

I see no point in carrying “Peace” placards and signs that read “No Blood for Oil,” or staging sit-downs in front of the Capitol, though I do not question their moral and legal right to do so. It is a matter of what kind of a neighbor we are going to be. If a rapist is at large in your neighborhood it is no time to carry peace signs. Nor are you a responsible neighbor if you seclude yourself in your home, lower the blinds, and protest “I believe in peace!” How about the rapist in your block? We are not only to be peace lovers but peacemakers, and to make peace and to preserve peace we may have to take up the sword.

Is it blood for oil? Not for oil *per se* but for the power of oil, in part at least. Every war is fought partly for material values, for what we call “our way of life.” But far more than oil is involved. We are fighting for civilized values, for human decency, for justice for the innocent and the helpless. We are fighting because we cannot live in the kind of world ordered by Saddam Hussein. If he can’t sit in the boat without boring a hole under his seat, then he has to leave the boat. If he will not leave peacefully, then we have to use other means to see that he leaves.

One discerning critic of the war asked a pertinent question, “Are we the 911 number for all the world?” The answer to that has to be a qualified yes, for we are the leading nation of the free world. We are the big guy in the neighborhood who is able to help the little guys. We may have to be selective in the responses we make to the 911 calls, but it is

clear that we have to be a responsible neighbor in the community of nations. With the rape of Kuwait by one who has dreams of empire, how could we but respond?

Then how should we as believers pray? As we have always prayed, for God's will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven, for peace on earth and goodwill toward humankind, for the time when nations will beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more. And that He will make us instruments of His peace.

And we will trust God through it all, realizing that He is neither surprised by nor unprepared for what has happened, and that He is in control. We are like the boy on what appeared to be a runaway train to the other passengers, all of whom were frightened. Noting his calm, they asked why he was not afraid. "My father is the engineer," he told them. It may not have been clear to the boy where his father was taking them, but he was confident they would arrive at their destination.

We are to believe like the psalmist believed when he sung in Ps. 66:7:

He rules by his power forever;
His eyes observe the nations;

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves.—the Editor

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I DIDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY

Cecil Hook

The sad refrain of an old hillbilly song lingers in my memory. The ballad tells of a tragic wreck on the highway, and the lament was, "I didn't hear nobody pray." The victims met the trauma with fatalism. It speaks of our inclination, even as believers, to face our most devastating circumstances without asking for divine help.

The assembled body of believers should be "a house of prayer." Disciples need the help that comes through prayer and strength that comes from those who pray with them. Assemblies should help to fill our need by congregational support in prayer. Even though we may approach God privately with our urgent requests, we may still feel lonely, forgotten, and ineffective without the intercession of others.

I would like to know that the things I am about to mention do not apply in your congregation. Traditionally, our prayers in assemblies have been impromptu without plan or forethought. Too often, they are repetitious, generalized prayers led by the next person

on the rotation list. Because of such ineffectiveness, the disciple with a breaking, burdened heart can leave our services unfulfilled, feeling that "I didn't hear nobody pray!"

How many of the deep personal, national, and universal concerns are addressed in the prayers in your assemblies? The checklist for petitions usually includes the sick and the afflicted, widows and orphans, those who have lost loved ones, the preacher, and the elders, along with a few variations. Little forethought is discerned in the prayer.

Consequently, a person filled with despairing anxieties, depression, stress, emotional instability, or feelings of helplessness may leave the service feeling that "I didn't hear nobody pray."

Do we ever pray for those paralyzed by low self-esteem, the disgraced, the convicted law-breaker, or those in prison?

If the jobless, those burdened by debt, the destitute, or the homeless were to attend our services, would they even receive any emotional support through our prayers?

A person whose faith is being tried by fire, or is overcome by temptation, or is fighting against overpowering doubts, or is being driven by peer pressure should be able to find strength in our prayer sessions together. But do they?

And what of those who came to the assembly in spite of disheartening marital problems, problems with children, problems with parents, alienations, broken friendships, divorce, and being victims of divorce? As to their needs being presented to the Lord, do they leave thinking, "I didn't hear nobody pray"?

Do we remember the lonely, those confined at home, those neglected helpless persons, and those in nursing homes. Even though these individuals might have once been very active in the congregations, when they can no longer attend, we let them fade from our concern as non-persons. Although we may not be able to attend to all their needs, we can remember them in prayer. When I think of these forgotten people, I often recall the line from Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner:*

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea,

And never a soul took pity on my soul in agony.

Wars rage; thousands die; and injustice deprives and enslaves its victims. Do we pray for peace constantly, or only when our own country is in conflict? Do not the hurting millions in the deprived nations merit our concern and intercession?

The television news brings the horrible picture of the starving around the world. We send some food but cannot feed them all; yet we can pray to the Source of food in their behalf. But do we?

We decry the corruption, greed, oppression, and tyranny of the officials of our country and other nations. But I don't hear nobody pray to God to use and overrule the evil men to bring about good. Prayer for the integrity of those in power is not a priority in our assemblies either.

Our nation is in a snow-balling, downhill roll of immorality—vulgarity, obscenity, profanity, pornography, dehumanizing activities, sexual promiscuity (whether by heterosexuals or homosexuals), mockery of God's standards, dope addiction and drug traffic, liquor addiction and its traffic, pleasure addiction, and flaunting of wealth. When was the last time you heard those diseases of decay laid before God in the church gathering? These current local and personal concerns should keep us agonizing in prayer as a body. "But I didn't hear nobody pray!"

It is estimated that about 20 million births have been aborted since the Roe vs. Wade decision of Jan. 22, 1973. That is 4,000 per day! But I never hear anybody cry out to God for those helpless victims in our churches.

The believers in Christ are shamelessly divided—both those in the Church of Christ and those outside of it. When did you last hear that grave problem mentioned in prayer? I was dropped from the list of those to lead public prayer here. It was later revealed that an elder had my name removed because the last time I led a prayer, I prayed for unity, and that made it sound like we were divided!

The God of the universe has promised sympathetic audience with us who are in Christ. "Ask, and it will be given you!" When we ask for bread, he will not give us a stone; when we ask for fish he will not give us a snake! "You do not have, because you ask not." Our prayers are hindered by lack of faith, lack of concern, and selfishness.

There are two reasons why we do not pray for these needs in our assemblies: those who lead the public prayers do not pray for them in their private prayers, and we do not make our specific needs known to those leading.

When we lead public prayers, let us be so discerning that each person present will feel that intercession was made for him or her by all those present. "I heard somebody—a whole body—pray for me!"—*1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

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Alexander Campbell On Personal Prayer

The Christian's life is, indeed, but one protracted communion with God, through his works of creation, providence, moral government and redemption. He sees, admires, and glorifies God in all these. Hence, his constant ejaculatory prayers and praises in the contemplation of all these manifestations of divine glory.

Still the Christian must have his stated seasons of prayer, as he has his stated meals. He must also have seasons of preparation for the enjoyment of them. We cannot profitably and reverently rush into the presence of God, as the horse rushes into battle. We must have time for self-examination; we must ask ourselves what we want, and how we expect to obtain it. We must enter into our closet and shut the door, and converse with ourselves and with our God by abstracting ourselves from the world in all its forms, its cares, its pleasures, and pursuits. This is essential to any spiritual advantage or profit in our communings with God.—*Millennial Harbinger*, 1849, p 7.

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

I urge you to give special attention to Cecil Hook's piece in this issue. I consider it one of the most soul-searching articles we have ever published. It gets to the taproot of our ills, personal and congregational. Cecil's essay was a blessing to me and I am sure it will be to you.

The place of women in the church is demanding attention in Churches of Christ as well as other churches, and, like other churches, the viewpoints range from traditional to non-traditional. The Cahaba Valley Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama has taken the position that women in their congregation can minister to men as well as to women, as God calls them. They have also announced that women will be appointed to serve as deacons as well as men, and that by 1994 they expect women to be giving sermons to the congregation. Insofar as we know this is only the second Church of Christ to go this far, the first being the Brookline, Mass. church, which has announced that its women may do any ministry than men do, including serving as elders. The Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston has not yet gone as far as Brookline and Cahaba Valley, but it has recently issued a report on changes that it is making. The women as well as men will serve in Sunday morning worship as ushers, greeting visitors, receiving the offering, reading Scripture, leading prayers, leading singing, and serving communion. As might be expected

these changes are of concern to the traditionalists, as is indicated by a recent issue of *The Spiritual Sword*, 1511 Getwell Rd., Memphis 38111 on "Role of Women in the Church." In this issue the position is taken that "it is not proper" for women to preach, lead prayer or singing, or preside at the Lord's Supper.

The controversy over the ministry of women among Churches of Christ sometimes becomes dramatic. In a recent forum at Freed-Hardeman University in Tennessee this issue was discussed. Leaders of both the Bering Drive and Brookline churches, referred to above, were on the program and were allowed to expound their more liberal views, which in itself is encouraging since Freed- Hardeman has the reputation of being a bastion of conservatism. Arguing on the ground of changing cultural conditions, Robert Randolph from Brookline said that he had no problem with women serving as elders in our churches today. Lynn Mitchell from Bering Drive agreed with Randolph. I know both Randolph and Mitchell as brothers who love the Lord and who sincerely seek to make the Scriptures relevant to the needs of our modern world. The traditionalists were, understandably, alarmed by these "tossed by every wind" viewpoints, and they too are sincere, intelligent brethren. It is one more instance of how we are going to see things differently. Unity does not demand that we see such matters exactly alike, but whether we will graciously allow congregations to differ. We can have churches with women leading in public worship and churches that do not, and we can still love and accept each other even as Christ loves and accepts us—in spite of our weaknesses!

The Lord willing, I will help the College Park Christian Church in Normal, Illinois, which also calls itself "A Church of Christ," celebrate the 20th anniversary of its merger, March 9-10. Back in 1971 I was around to see the Emerson St. Church of Christ (non-instrument) and the Sunset Christian Church, both of Normal, merge into a congregation that took the above dual name. Bruce Parmenter of Wichita, Ks. will join me that weekend for the celebration. It would be delightful to see friends who live in that general area. A banquet is planned for Sunday night. Call the College Park church for further information, 309-452-1598.

If God grants, I will be at the Overland Park Christian Church in Overland Park, Ks. (Kansas City area), April 26-28, for a meeting of the executive committee of the World Convention of Churches of Christ. The committee is responsible for the convention that will be in Long Beach, August 5-9, 1992. Circle that date and plan to attend. The WCCC convention, which is held every four years, is a significant event because it is an umbrella convention that includes all branches of the Stone-Campbell tradition. It is a worldwide fellowship of our people. I have been asked to prepare the study guide this time around, which is both an honor and a delight. At the convention in New Zealand in 1988 people from all three churches of our Movement were on the program.

The Friendswood Church of Christ in the Houston area has published a “Congregational Profile” that hints of “the road less traveled” for one of our churches. It reads in part, “We have come to understand and accept the freedoms and demands of God’s wondrous Grace. We appreciate and learn from our traditions but strive foremost to follow the teachings of the scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit.” They say they want “the openness and freshness caused by daily growth and walking with Christ, even though at times we are fearful of leaving the comfort and security of human tradition.” They say they “accept, love, and show people of all types the redeeming, lifting, forgiving Christ.”

The World Bible Translation Center in Fort Worth, a Church of Christ agency, has begun a translation of the Bulgarian New Testament. Bulgaria has long been in need of an easy-to-read rendition in its own language. The work should be completed this year. The work will be done in Bulgaria and will involve native translators. Erwin Bishop is directing the project that will prove to be a great blessing.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

In our travels we see bright signs of many who are disenchanted with self-serving traditions focused merely on personal preference or long held opinions. Many are breaking out of molds others have placed them in, and we notice great growth and joy in their lives. *—Curtis and Carole Lloyd, Grand Ledge, Michigan*

Raccoon John Smith converted my great, great, great grandmother in Kentucky when he preached at a little Baptist church. My family moved to Missouri and this distant grandmother and her slave are shown together as members of the same Church of Christ. *—Mrs. Marshall Hardy, Arlington, Texas.*

When I read of your plans to phase out your paper I had almost the same feeling in the pit of my stomach that I had when I was told of my brother Carl’s death. Your articles have been out of this world in provoking people to think and in creating the right attitude toward other believers.*—Paul Ketcherside, Nowata, Oklahoma*

I just listened to a tape on your presentation on ecumenism at the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Tx. It reminded me of what Carl Ketcherside said about Jesus’ prayer for unity, “It is significant to note that He did not pray that we would be evangelistic, or generous, or courageous, or holy. . . only that we would be united.” More and more I am

convinced that this is what God wants me to do—to pray, work, and speak for unity among His people.—*Doug Hale, Portales, New Mexico*

There are about two dozens factions in Churches of Christ. Each thinks it constitutes the one faithful and true Body of Christ, while the others are in error. To be in fellowship with any of these it is not enough to be a baptized believer, for one must also follow the legalistic creed of that particular faction.—*J. James Albert, Box 811, Corcoran, Ca. 93212*

(This is a sample of what this brother says in his "California Letter," which you may receive without charge by writing to him. He is himself of the non-class, one-cup Churches of Christ.—*Editor*)

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BOOK NOTES

I am reading with deep appreciation a new book by Homer Hailey on *The Divorced and Remarried Who Would Come to God.* It holds interest to me because in recent years brother Hailey has been maligned for the position he takes in this book by those with whom he has long been associated, the conservative, non-Herald of Truth Churches of Christ. In this book Homer Hailey, who was my teacher at ACU and a man I have long loved and respected, takes a position on divorce and remarriage similar to the position I have long taken in this journal. He says he will not legislate where God has not legislated, and so he concludes that the divorced may remarry with God's approval. We will send you a copy for only $5.50 postpaid.

If you want to gird yourself for a conversation with a Mormon elder, you should study *The Bible and Mormon Scriptures* by Charles Crane. It will leave you wondering how anybody could be a Mormon. The answer is that they do not know what is in this book or even their own books. $5.95 post-paid.

If you need a sensible guide in making your way through the Bible—and we can all use help!—I suggest *How To Understand The Bible* by Robert Palmer. $6.95 postpaid.

We are pleased that we still get enthusiastic responses to my history of our people in Churches of Christ-Christian Churches entitled *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches.* We will send you a copy for $21.95, and we are confident you will be pleased. Or you can get a free copy when you send us eight subs, new or

renewals (including your own), to this journal at $4.00 each, total $28.00. You must request the free book, please.

Our bound volume for 1989-90 entitled *The Hope of the Believer* will soon go to the bindery and should be ready by spring. You should reserve your copy now, and the book will be sent to you with invoice enclosed. We have six other bound volumes dating from 1977-88, except for 1979-80, all of which are only $58.00.

For those interested in back issues, loose copies are 60 cents each, but we will send you a sampling of 15 copies, selected by us, for only $4.00 or 25 copies for $6.00.

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